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roomy so that a man could squat down and pull his knees up inside the garment. Sometimes it was folded around the loins as its wearer squatted on the ground or mat. On cold mornings extra warmth was obtained by wrapping a blanket round the body, either a thick one of the same hand-woven cotton, or one of wool bought from some bazaar.

In the Toungoo Hills, the Bwè and other tribes usually wore a shorter smock, with all kinds and variations of stripes, which would hardly reach to their knees. They covered their legs with baggy Shan "bombies" or pants, usually black in colour.

For a number of years the Karens on the plains and in the towns have worn the usual Burmese dress consisting of a *longyi* (skirt) with a white jacket in the warm weather and dark thick imported clothing in the cold.

The usual dress for the women has been the *longyi*, worn over the lower part of the body and a shorter *hsay* or smock over the upper part. The former was woven by the women themselves but the latter was often of imported cloth, usually black. Sometimes black velvet was used for the smock. Among the Sgaws the finest smocks were made of homespun black or dark blue cloth and were trimmed with rows of Job's Tears, the white seeds that grow readily in their plantations. Otherwise, bits of blue or red ribbon or strips of cloth were used for ornaments. Often many strings of beads were wrapped about the neck, some of which were supposed to have magical value to ward off evil spirits.

The women of the villages near Thandaung among the Bwès, or Mopghas as they call themselves, wove very elaborate skirts in which a number of colours were beauti-

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flying about a light people say: "Let the 'k' las" of beasts and other creatures fall into the flame, but let the 'k' las' of men fly carefully and save themselves."

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Inanimate objects have their "k' las," as well as the lower creatures. Ownership in such possessions is duly observed by killing the pigs and fowls of a woman when she dies. The remains are thrown away or given to foreigners, who do not share the superstitions of the Karen. The paddy-cleaning implements and clothing of the deceased are either burned or buried with the corpse, unless they are laid on top of her grave. In like manner the oxen belonging to a man who has died are killed and disposed of, while his personal effects are burned or put in the grave with him. Otherwise, the owner's "k' la" might return to the village for his property and thereby bring calamity on the inhabitants.

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The idea seems to prevail among the Karen that the "k' las" enter and leave their bodies through the fontanel on the top of the head. In case a child falls and cries the mother will blow on this spot, in order to keep the life principle from escaping. However, the customary method of preventing the escape of the "k' la" is to tie a string around the wrists, either one or both of them, after fanning up the arms to blow the "k' la" back. Anybody may perform this act, but the services of elders or necromancers ("wi") are preferred.

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Another conception of the "k' la," quite distinct from that set forth above, is that it is a seven-fold spirit inhabiting the body, whose death it is constantly striving to accomplish through one or another of seven methods, namely, insanity, licentiousness, epilepsy, oppression, diseases, accidents, and injury by wild beasts. Even from the birth of a person the seven-fold "k' la" accepts the responsibility of causing his or her death and is engaged in constant struggle with that person's "so" (personality or character) for the mastery. As long as the "so" is strong, it serves as the individual's guardian angel; and he remains immune both from the attacks of the seven-fold "k' la" and from the magic arts of witches and necromancers. However powerful the charm that may be employed against him, his dominating "so" will ward it off; but if his "so" should become weak, he will soon lose his immunity.[15]

[15] See Dr. J. Wade's account in *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, pp. 450, ff.

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CHAPTER XXVI

MAGIC

The division lines between religion, magic, and science, as these matters appear to primitive peoples, are hard to trace. In truth, the three fields so overlap and interpenetrate that it is almost impossible to tell where one begins and the other leaves off. However, religion for them may be defined as consisting of the socially recognized practices and conceptions belonging to the tribe or group and relating to the supernatural powers or forces. Through their conceptions and practices the people try to enter into relation with these powers for their own welfare. Magic may be defined as the art of influencing the action of spirits and occult powers for the purpose of serving private ends. This art may involve resorting to secret and sinister means for an anti-social purpose. As many, if not most, of the magical rites are concerned with matters of health, the realm of magic includes a portion of that of science, especially of medical science, which makes use of the effects of roots, herbs, and minerals on the human body, as well as of other treatments, which form the beginning of a real scientific knowledge.

The underlying principle of Karen magic seems to be the "pgho," that all-pervasive impersonal power which is so potent for good or ill. By observing certain ceremonies and incantations the individual is thought to be able to induce the "pgho" to take up its abode in some person or object and have it accomplish the end he has in view.

The belief in the power of magic doubtless grew out of incidental observation and primitive experimentation with the unseen forces surrounding all human life, in which coincidence of events was ignorantly seized upon as establishing a necessary connection between them. That the magical power of an alleged charm rests on very insecure foundations is illustrated in an experience which I had with a Karen, who brought me two magical stones about the color and size of horse-chestnuts to be tested. The Karen had inherited these stones, which had long been regarded in his family as charms against injury by weapons. He wanted me to fire my

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gun at them; but I had one of my native helpers fire the gun, in order to preclude the deduction on the part of the owner of the stones that a foreigner's handling of the gun had prevented the working of the charm. The discharge of the weapon knocked the stones to bits to the great surprise of the owner, who exclaimed repeatedly that the stones were worthless after all. Such decisive demonstrations of the uselessness of magic were, of course, lacking in the olden time, and the failure of a charm to accomplish what was desired could always be explained by some unfavorable circumstance, such as the omission of some necessary rite or the ill-humor of the spirit whose coöperation was necessary. It should be remembered also that the absence of the accustomed charm produces an adverse psychological effect on those depending on them. I am told that both Karen and Burman boys who play football, have a "medicine" to protect them from injury and to bring victory. Without this talisman, which has its counterpart in the mascot of some American baseball and football teams, the players are apt to do poorly and lose the game. In like manner a Karen, who attributes his indisposition to the evil influence of some one who is bewitching him, is likely to become worse through the power of suggestion; just as his fellow-villager, who has placed himself under the protective charms and remedies of the medicine-man, often derives benefit from his own faith in their efficiency.

In some outlying Karen districts there are still persons of both sexes among the Karens who profess to maintain communication with the powers of the invisible world. Of these "wi," so-called, one group has dealings with the powers of evil, while the other looks to "Y'wa," the eternal God, for the revelation of unseen things. The latter group is sometimes designated leaders of religion ("bu hko," heads of the feasts). The prophesies of the deliverance of the Karen from the Burman yoke and of the coming of the white brother were uttered by some of these "wi." The members of the former group are believed to be able to see into hell and to bring evil forces to bear on men. They go into trances and work themselves into a state of frenzy, writhing on the ground and frothing at the mouth until they have received a message. Then they calm down and deliver their oracle in verse. They are reputed to have often deceived their patrons. They are at enmity with the prophets of the second group. Their influence is limited to those of weak "so" or personal powers.[2] Not only have strong-

[2] See Chapter XXI on Religious Conceptions, p. 221.

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T36 boos. Quite satisfied with this demonstration of their magic
789 power, the grandmother allowed them to go on their mission. In
538 the battle that followed the seven orphans severally engaged the champions of the seven victorious villages and won back for the maiden's father the treasure that he had been forced to pay over in the previous raids. The oldest of the brothers then received the hand of the chief's daughter in marriage, having cleared himself of the curse that had rested upon him as an orphan.

Why such extraordinary powers have been attributed to the once despised orphan is not known. At first he was feared for the bad luck he might bring to the other inhabitants of the village, if allowed to remain within the stockade. That he did not perish as an outcast in the jungle must have been regarded as a sort of miracle by the village community, whose members had always lived and worked together in close interdependence. They must have looked upon him with awe and believed that he was protected by some powerful influence, not only from the evilly disposed "Bgha" but also from the dangers of the forest. It was, therefore, natural enough to regard him in course of time as a person who had "pgho." In these later days orphans appear to have been considered less extraordinary persons, as indicated by the following couplet:

[539] "In olden times the orphans had magic.
Orphans now must talk" [like other persons].

791 The "k' thi thra" or "medicine-teachers" constitute another
753 group that should be mentioned among magic-workers. It is true
●757 that they possess a rude knowledge of the efficacy of roots and herbs, but they also sometimes dispense disgusting and filthy concoctions. The Karen, like other primitive peoples, regard sickness as due to some mysterious force or "mana" and believe that all medicine, even that prescribed by European physicians, operates to dispel or vanquish this force. They expect a dose to cure immediately and discredit a medicine that must be taken repeatedly. Hence, in general, they prefer their native "medicine-teacher" and his nostrums to the educated physician and his medicine, the therapeutic effects of which are beyond their understanding. Doubtless, some Karens do distinguish between the charm and the drug, but most of them seem to cling to the idea that the drug has more or less of the charm connected with it.

789 Magic among the Karen, as among other primitive races, is divisible into white and black magic. The former is the beneficent

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kind, involving the use of certain rites, practices, and conceptions by which one tries to protect one's self against unknown powers and forces. White magic may be divided in turn into three varieties, namely, defensive, productive, and prognostic magic.

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As suggested by its name, defensive magic is employed to safe- 789
guard one from injury and to prolong one's life. Charms are used, 825
such as the wild boar's tusk without a nerve cavity, to prevent the possessor from being wounded by the firing of a gun or the bolt from a crossbow. The tusk charm is called "soh."

The boar's tusk must be the tusk of an old and fierce animal (for the older the animal, the smaller the cavity), which was, therefore, hard to kill. This, according to Karen belief, renders its owner equally hard to destroy. Sometimes the tooth of an an- [769] cestor is worn, in order to gain the reputed courage and strength of the latter. A female wears such a charm around her neck. A man may wear it set in a finger-ring. The latter method of wearing the tooth would not serve in the case of a woman or giri, for unavoidably it would be brought in contact with her skirt and that would be disrespectful to the dead, thus destroying the value of the charm. A lock of hair or the parings of nails from a corpse are also frequently worn to prolong the life of the wearer.

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A certain plant of magic power, called "k' thi baw tho" or 789
"tiger medicine" is said by the Karen to confer such immunity upon him who uses it that he may enter a den of fierce tigers at any time without the least fear.[4] It is also reported that by burying the root of this magic plant at the bottom of a hole seven cubits deep, pulling the root up with one's teeth, and jumping out—according to one of my informants—even when men are standing around the opening with sticks in their hands, one will be turned into a man-eating tiger and spend the remainder of his life in the jungle composing verses and springing down upon unwary persons. Certainly, one who can believe that a man can leap out of so deep a hole and dodge the blows of his fellows at the top, will experience no difficulty in believing the rest of this story.

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A second form of white magic is what is defined as productive 241
magic. It has to do with increasing a crop, rendering a family pros- 824
perous, or adding children to the family circle. Certain plants of the ginger family *(Zingiberaceae)* growing in Burma are supposed to be endowed with the power of bringing a good crop production. Consequently, they are set out at the entrances of the

[4] *Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, pp. 643, ff.

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conditions being attributed to the presence of wind ("k'li"), fire ("me"), or water ("paw leh"). The elders assert that fifteen hundred cavities in the abdomen contain wind, twelve contain fire, and one contains water. The prevalence of wind over the other elements produces pride, ambition, avarice, evil desires, and hilarity. When fire is in the ascendancy, one is incited to envy, malice, hatred, and revenge. When water predominates, issuing from its single cavity, it disseminates peace, love, kindness, patience, quietness, and other allied virtues. The various qualities are intermingled in one's character in proportion to the mingling of the several elements.[9]

Many of the charms worn by both the Karen and the Burmese are intended to prevent wind from gaining the ascendency in the abdomen. Among such charms are strings of dried berries of certain plants, strings of coins that have been blown upon, and knotted cords that have been put on the wearer by elders or prophets.

Something remains to be said about the "k' thi thras" or "medicine-teachers," who compound drugs from various roots and herbs with which they practice a sort of medical lore, in addition to their occult rites. There is no doubt but that they understand the medicinal action of certain plants. They will often point out a particular tree with the remark that its leaves are good for fever or some other ailment. On my request for some prescriptions a Karen doctor gave me a hundred of them. Dr. Wade has collected over forty pages of medical formulae of various kinds, among them many of real value. Dr. Mason mentions the name of a small creeping plant *(Hydrocotyle asiatica)* which, if applied as a poultice in time, will arrest, if it does not cure, leprosy.[10] How many of these Karen prescriptions are of Burmese, Shan, or Talign origin I am unable to say. I have been told several times that the Karen who still remain in their primitive condition, depend wholly on magic and offerings to cure sickness. My observation leads me to believe that the use of medicine increases, as the people come more and more into contact with other races.

The Karen believe that smells have a marked effect on the body, both for good and for ill. There is hardly anything that a Karen or, indeed, a Burman fears so much as he does the smell of cooking fat ("ta neu xo"). They believe that the odor somehow enters the body, especially if there is an abrasion of the skin,

[9] *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, p. 500.
[10] Dr. F. Mason, *British Burma, Its People and Productions*, pp. 581, ff.

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782 787 823 a second time and if necessary a third, in order to obtain a favorable response.

755 The Karen esteem the gall-bladder of a certain variety of fish as a valuable medicine, but assert that during the early days of August this medicinal organ becomes enlarged and "hot" (that is, flabby). They, therefore, consider it necessary to desist from work, in order to restore the gall-bladder to its normal condition and efficacy. During the other months this medicine is thought to be strong and useful in certain severe illnesses.

751 784 The time for gathering the herbs of which dyestuffs are made, is determined by divination. If, however, some one happens to pick them on a day found to be unfavorable, he becomes subject to a tabu, lest colds and coughs should spread throughout the village. To prevent this epidemic, the erring person must cut a sheaf of tall grass and set it up in the ashes of his fireplace, and when the other villagers come in they must spit on it. An elder then takes up the grass, saying: "May all coughs and colds be prevented. May we not catch them." Next, he leads the people out into a field, where he plies their heads and the stumps in the field with the sheaf until it is broken, meantime calling out: "Beat here. Beat there. Beat the tails of the demons and woodpeckers. Do not bring us illnesses, coughs, or colds." When he has finished, he leaves the frayed grass against a stump, and they all return to their houses. Finally, the elder asks in a loud voice: "Is every one well?" and they all shout back: "All are well." This is repeated three times, after which they all shut their doors and refrain from work during the rest of the day.

784 626 While all of these numerous tabus have helped to nourish the ancient superstitions of the Karen, it is well to remember that some of them, in the absence of other social and moral sanctions, have exercised a beneficial influence. Among the latter are the tabus against marriage outside of the tribe, and especially outside of the race. These tabus have been instrumental in maintaining the integrity of the various tribes and of the people as a whole, and in enabling the Karen to live largely apart from the corrupting influences of neighboring peoples. Other tabus have served to magnify the importance of the religious rites and to enforce a stricter morality than prevails among some primitive races. It is obvious that these benefits have been secured at a great economic cost, when one considers the large number of holidays which falls